One Original Thing

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One Original Thing

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Will Graham is busy with his new full-time position at a Baltimore library, where he indulges his love of books and maintains the rules that protect him from being too annoyed by dealing with the public. Namely, "shhh, this is a library!"

Hannibal Lecter, bakery/cafe owner by day and Ripper by night, is besotted with the cynical, antisocial young librarian at first sight. He has to work hard enough to establish what becomes a special, precious friendship with Will. What can he do to open Will's eyes to his appeal as a romantic prospect? After all, Will begins by only seeing Hannibal in a platonic light.

By a marvelous twist of fate, what makes Will realize his life-changing attraction to Hannibal is nothing Hannibal could have predicted...

Notes

Thanks to Alexa for another brilliant prompt 💕✨

See the end of the work for more notes

That whole friendship....thing....

Hannibal never understood the meaning of the term “head over heels in love” until he walked into the Baltimore Public Library’s Pratt branch one fateful afternoon in April.

As it was April, he wore his “light Spring coat,” an olive green leather jacket both stylish and casually impressive. Not everyone could pull off leather, and fewer still, a leather jacket in an unconventional shade. For this reason, Hannibal usually left his jacket on for others to admire, waiting a few minutes after entering any building before slipping it off.

He also wore a pair of pressed, fitted navy slacks and a navy poplin button-up shirt, tucked in to show off his narrow waist. The trousers provided a similarly flattering view of his ass and thighs, without appearing to be worn for this reason. The point was to appear entirely breezy and casual.

Sliding his Gucci aviator sunglasses to the top of his head, where they sat at a charmingly “thoughtless” angle among strands of blonde, light brown and silver hair, he strolled into the library holding three books to be returned.

He always looked his best because he considered every day a fresh opportunity to encounter new adventures, some of which might require him to use his appearance for his own manipulative gain, and some of which were adventures of the sexual, superficial and recreational kind. One never knew what was around the next corner, and today his philosophy held true in the most unexpected manner.

Anyone who had met Hannibal Lecter would never guess he’d ever had an overdue library book in his life, but in a bizarre twist of extremely rare neglect, he had three.

That was why he began his visit by walking right up to the Circulation desk. And it was then that Hannibal fell in love so quickly, the universe seemed to upend.

Standing in line, he fell easily into his usual pastime of people watching and eavesdropping on conversations. The nearest one occurring happened to be between a woman whose books were getting checked out and the librarian who was scanning the books.

“I’m telling you, I put that new Colleen Hoover on hold all the way back in November,” the woman crowed, her insistent tone immediately annoying Hannibal.

This was a library, after all. And surely there was no need to speak of one’s claim to a bestseller in such a dramatic manner.

“Shhh,” said the Librarian, a young man in his thirties with curly brunette hair and bright blue eyes behind brown-framed glasses. “Mrs. Shannon, really.”

He shook his head as if she’d spat on the floor in front of him. “Remember where you are. Now, as for your hold, according to your records here, you never had one. Would you like me to add you to the list now?”

“Now?” Mrs. Shannon hissed in a whisper, “Are you kidding me? How many people are on that list ahead of me?”

In a blase tone, the Librarian replied, “three hundred and forty-eight.”

“This is not fair, and it isn’t right,” she fumed. “Don’t bother putting me on the list, and you can take these books back, I’m done with this place. Barnes and Noble’s it is!”

“Be my guest,” the librarian said flatly.

She stalked off in a fervor of oversized pearls and aggressive perfume, heels clacking on the floor as she went. The librarian closed his eyes briefly and sighed as if this noise offended him to the soul.

Hannibal stepped up to the desk next, heart in his throat. Hands now sweaty on the protective plastic slipcovers of three overdue classic novels, and strangely elevated body heat causing the light spring jacket to feel heavier than a snowsuit. His sunglasses slipped from his head without his noticing and landed on the checkout counter, making him turn pink and scramble to retrieve them.

The young man, who was stunningly beautiful with the loveliest voice and a cynical, grumpy attitude which enchanted Hannibal immediately, raised his eyebrows, but did not scold, most likely deciding that the noise was accidental.

“How may I help you?” This angel – his name tag said “Will Graham” – asked him dully.

Hannibal’s gaze wandered over the younger man’s perfect body in an atrocious outfit consisting of a plaid button-up tucked into ugly khakis, a mismatching tie of equal quality, and a blazer with elbow patches. He was hypnotizing, breathtaking…

Of course, Hannibal began to “turn on the charm.” Rather than a traditional or businesslike greeting, he said, with a nod towards the exit (indicating the disgraced Mrs. Shannon), “You are down one devoted patron it seems, but somehow I think the library will fare better for the loss.”

Will frowned. His vivid eyes flickered restlessly over Hannibal’s features, then to the small stack of books the older man held, along with the sunglasses, almost crushed by a careless grip.

“Most of the time we go overboard trying to get the word out about why libraries still matter and attract new patrons. We have to, before we get swallowed up by the despicable killer whale that is Amazon.com. But I don’t consider Mrs. Shannon a patron, so no loss.”

“What do you consider her?”

“Gone,” Will shrugged. “Are you checking those out or returning them, Mr….?”

“Lecter,” Hannibal grinned, shaking the young man’s hand and finding it firm and warm. “Hannibal Lecter. I’ve just opened up a new bakery around the corner from this branch. As

it's my day off, and those are rare, I decided to take care of a long-neglected obligation while seeing how I like this library, given that it is so close to my…"

"Mr. Lecter, there are people in line behind you," Will said hurriedly. "Returning or checking out? Oh, and um…congrats on the new business."

Hannibal's face had fallen at the first part of Will's reply and then his smile returned with the compliment. "Thank you, Mr. Graham. Or may I call you Will?"

"It completely doesn't matter."

Hannibal leaned in slightly and said in a hushed, conspiratorial tone, "Wonderful to meet you, Will. Oh, and…returning."

This was a style of flirtation that Hannibal had never even considered a risk of embarrassment or rejection in the past, as he had seduced so many men and women with the lean-in and smirking "inside joke" that it defied all expectation to see it fail.

Will gave him a perplexed, but still disinterested look. "Okay, returning. Wow. Do you have your card, sir?"

"It's Hannibal," Hannibal reminded him.

Really, this was pushing it. How many Hannibals did Will meet? At the very least, his name ought to stick in anyone's mind.

With the patient dignity of a martyr, Hannibal resumed, "And no, I'm afraid it's been a long time since I've been to the public library. Might I sign up for a card?"

Will sighed as if exhausted. "Jeanie," he called softly over his shoulder.

A mean-looking woman around Hannibal's age with short, black hair and a remarkably profound case of "resting bitch face" emerged from the back office, approaching the desk.

"Can you handle the next patron? I have to do a card replacement and some late returns." Will's tone was polite, but Jeanie scowled.

"You know how much work I have piled up with those accessions," she accused, as if Will was somehow responsible for the amount of work anyone had at a given time.

"Well, since I am now a supervisor and equal to your illustrious rank, Jeanie, you can't get away with speaking to me like that anymore." Will glared at her. "Go and find a part-time shelver to terrorize."

Jeanie rolled her eyes. "Beats me how you got promoted." In a louder, but still library-safe voice she called, "I can take who's next."

"It sounds like congratulations are due to you as well, Will. On the recent promotion." Hannibal smiled, hoping the encouragement would cheer the almost absurdly handsome librarian.

“Thanks, it was a long time coming,” Will said, distracted because he was busy at the computer. “Okay, Mr. Lecter, I do see the record for your old card from years ago. Along with the rundown on these books, which are…over a decade late.”

“I’m dreadfully sorry. Does this mean I am subject to theft charges? Or a lifetime exile from the public library system?” Hannibal’s teasing tone fell on deaf ears.

“You may be sorry, but you also owe fifty dollars. That’s the maximum late fee, which is lucky for you. Otherwise it would cost you around three hundred dollars to gain back your check-out privileges.”

Hannibal enjoyed this little lecture and pouted as he took out his wallet. “I can’t overemphasize how deeply repentant I am for the moral and responsibility lapse. It’s unlike me, but I had borrowed the books around the same time I moved from an apartment to a house. In all of the packing and confusion of the undertaking, these became mixed with my own book collection. I only rediscovered them yesterday.”

“Hmm. That kind of thing happens all the time.” Will accepted Hannibal’s credit card and passed it through the scanner before giving him a receipt to sign.

Hannibal took this opportunity to provide not only his signature, but also his phone number.

“What’s this?” Will asked, examining the receipt, which he had been about to tuck into a rolodex already overstuffed with small papers.

“I’m enjoying our chat, and thought you might like to continue it sometime, so that is my number.”

“Why would I want to keep talking about late books?”

“I meant, the ‘getting to know each other’ part.”

Will looked embarrassed and slightly guilty about making Hannibal feel bad. “Look, I’m sorry, but I don’t date men.”

“It doesn’t have to be a date,” Hannibal said, which is a thing he never should have said under any circumstances, but he let it come out of his mouth because he was distracted by learning that Will had never been with a man before.

Triumphing with the opportunity to be Will’s “first,” Hannibal found his infatuation deepening even more. So, Will had never felt a man’s touch and known the powerfully intimate pleasures which Hannibal could give him, and no one else could have possibly approached.

In short, Hannibal heard, “*I don’t date men YET.*”

“I don’t really need new friends.” Will had checked the three books back into the system and placed them on a nearby cart. He handed Hannibal a replacement library card. “Can you please sign this as well?”

“Perhaps everyone needs a new friend,” Hannibal suggested. “I understand if you’re not interested. But my cafe is called Red Velvet, and you are welcome to a free coffee and pastry anytime. Thank you for the new card and your patience with my past crimes.”

Will chuckled, humor finally reaching his pretty eyes. “Okay, I’ll keep the cafe in mind. You’re free to check out materials again. Uhh, have a good one.”

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Will didn’t actually intend to go to the “Red Velvet Bakery” or whatever in accordance with the stranger’s invitation.

It was sort of flattering to get hit on like that in such a sweet, polite manner, all said. He usually turned people off right away with his dark, sarcastic attitude. But this guy, who was apparently accomplished and intelligent, and certainly good-looking, gravitated to Will like a magnet.

Hannibal was even well-dressed, although his outfit reminded Will of something George Clooney would wear while boarding his private jet to fly to some ginormous vineyard he owned, and not so much an everyday sort of attire.

But sadly, Will wasn’t gay and had never had the slightest inclination to explore intimacy on that end of the spectrum. He’d love to find love, but knew how unlikely it was, with his social awkwardness and emotional confusion, his tendency to hide under a prickly uniform of cynicism.

If by some crazy happenstance he ever did fall in love, he knew it would be with a woman. He pictured her in his mind vaguely resembling a blurred combination of Sandra Bullock and Julia Roberts. That was probably the furthest it was going to go, this idea of Will and romance.

He just thought it might lead Hannibal on if he showed up at his work, although it had been a kind invitation. Plus, the bakery name sounded more like a shop of high-end erotica than well, a bakery. And the outside of it looked all fancy when Will glanced at it on the way to work the next morning after meeting Hannibal.

The doors were painted the exact shade of Red Velvet frosting, and the signs above the door were gold, same for the enticing advertisements on the big windows. “Best pastries in the city” was followed by a list of names (presumably of pastries) that Will had never even heard of, mostly in French. He didn’t go in much for posh, rich-people stuff, and it wasn’t his world, that was why. Restaurants or stores or parties like that made him feel even more out of place than usual.

He got his terrible generic coffee from the corner store, along with a breakfast sandwich that tasted like plastic and went on to work as usual.

But he ended up at Red Velvet later, for wild reasons. Or just one, really, he guessed. His bad luck hadn’t run out yet and returned to him full force during his walk from the library to the train home after closing time. Bad luck in the form of a bike messenger zooming down the

sidewalk like a complete lunatic, trying to get a last delivery in before closing time at whatever place he was headed.

The messenger smashed right into Will from behind, knocking him over. Will landed with a surprised yelp on the concrete with scraped elbows and knees.

“Hey, learn how to walk!” the messenger yelled out as he rode away.

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Although Hannibal hadn’t seen Will Graham since yesterday, and that was far too long, he reasoned to himself that there was no need to despair. After all, it seemed so fateful that he should come across those books and go into that very library branch to return them. As if he was destined to meet Will and their lives were meant to share the same, intertwined design, written across the starry sky.

Who was Hannibal to argue with the hands of fate?

It did not seem relevant that up until he saw Will, he didn’t believe in fate.

But it was unheard of for him to be late, delinquent or otherwise forgetful of anyone’s property; this was the one case in his entire fifty years in which he behaved so absent-mindedly. And between his busy social schedule and bustling job (previous to this new cafe, he’d opened three others in various Maryland cities), he really had forgotten about the three books, which were:

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins
The Complete Plays of Oscar Wilde
And
Swann’s Way by Marcel Proust

Hannibal remembered thoroughly enjoying the first two books and finding Proust to be tiresome. Now, he was grateful to the weaver of all those self-indulgent reveries, for the book was among those which brought him to Will.

Fortunately, Hannibal was capable of thinking all of this over without making any mistakes in his current task, which was making fresh Profiterole, one of his most popular items in an eclectic menu.

Then, as he was adding the latest layer of sweet custard between cakes of beautiful, light choux pastry, he heard the door of his cafe swing open with unusual force. This made him look up from his work behind the counter. He saw Will Graham, who had ripped clothing that revealed bloody scrapes on his elbows and knees.

“Please watch the counter for me, Maya,” Hannibal said hurriedly to his employee, a college girl who was an excellent worker despite answering most questions with “Yup” or “Nope,” seldom seeing a need for further elaboration.

“Yup,” Maya said, gesturing to the next person in a long line that stretched back to the door of the establishment.

A shockwave of disappointment ran through the entire line of customers as they realized they would not be served by Hannibal this time. There was much verbal lamenting among regulars who had a crush on him, but Hannibal couldn’t be bothered about anything but Will.

“Sorry to burst in on you like this,” Will said sheepishly, wincing with pain. “But I need first aid and this was the closest place to where I got bike-bludgeoned. I figured you might have a kit. You seem like the responsible type.”

“Of course, come with me, it’s in the back kitchen. Can you walk?”

“Oh, yeah, nothing’s broken except my patience with the evening commute in this city.” Will trailed Hannibal behind the counter and into an immaculate kitchen where he sat down at a small table while the chef looked for the first aid kit.

“Bike-bludgeoned?” Hannibal repeated.

“Hit by a messenger, who then yelled at me for not knowing how to walk. Fun.” Will’s voice was adorably bitter.

“Here we are,” Hannibal smiled. “Can I help you with the bandages?”

“I got it,” Will assured him. “Thank you for this.”

“It’s nothing at all. I’m right here if there is anything more I can do.”

Will glanced at Hannibal curiously, then quickly looked back at his arm. He used the first aid scissors to cut what was left of his sleeve off and then started tending to his injuries.

“Can you talk to me about something?” Will asked as he dabbed his wounds with alcohol. With a tiny, wincing smile he said, “It will distract me from the pain.”

“I was just wondering if you would ever have taken me up on the invitation to come here, in a world in which you were never knocked down by a lunatic on wheels.” Hannibal felt his heart lift with happiness as – despite his discomfort – Will laughed at his remark.

“Okay, well that is very *direct*. And distracting,” Will noted.

“I’m glad it was effective.” He watched Will’s thoughtful face expectantly.

“Uhh, maybe not, I might not have come here, but it’s not for the reason you might think.”

“You don’t strike me as someone who would be afraid to befriend me merely because I once attempted to ask you on a date.” Hannibal raised his light eyebrows and enjoyed the self-conscious blush in Will’s cheeks.

Will might believe himself “straight” and immune to Hannibal’s flirtatious charms, but it wasn’t often that someone asked Will out so nicely; that was obvious.

Hannibal kept getting a pleasant, warm feeling whenever he was around Will, like nothing he'd ever felt. He wanted to stay there forever, wherever Will was.

"Definitely not, I felt bad enough having to turn you down," Will admitted, cleaning a scrape with alcohol and grunting at the pain, diverted by the conversation so that the process hurt less. "But you were very polite and respectful. It's more the whole…friends…thing. I usually don't have them. Or I try to have them, but it doesn't work out."

"You should never feel bad saying yes or no as long as the answer comes from your heart," Hannibal smiled.

He stood to get Will a cold glass of water and handed it over, watching as the younger man took a long, restorative gulp.

"I needed that. Thank you," Will nodded, returning to his work, focusing on the other arm now.

Hannibal sat in the chair opposite Will. "You also could not have been kinder in explaining, without any frills or hesitations, that you were not interested. I appreciate that sort of honesty, and it is rare to find it. You shouldn't worry so much about having bad manners, as it's more than evident that you were raised with excellent ones. Your parents…?"

Will shook his head. "My parents didn't raise me," he said to the bright red, ugly-beautiful scrape on his elbow. Examining it, he pressed an alcohol pad on the areas that had hit the pavement. "Ow, *goddammit,* I'm gonna find out who that asshole on the bike was and sue them."

"You're within your rights," Hannibal agreed.

He certainly looked forward to potentially learning the name of the perpetrator who had "hit and run" the most beautiful creature in existence.

It seemed to him that this bike messenger owed Will more than money, he owed his life. That was for Hannibal to manage, in due time.

"I should have realized you grew up taking care of yourself," Hannibal mused. "You're patching yourself up as if doing it without help is a foregone conclusion."

Will shrugged. "I mean, you don't get help enough times, it starts to make you prideful. I much prefer to do everything for myself, not to be a burden or to rely on anyone else."

"Friends rely on one another. Would that really be a problem for you?"

"Growing up in some of the less nice foster homes in Louisiana definitely gave me what you'd call trust issues. The last time I made a friend, it was a dog named Winston, and now he's about the only one I've got. And I didn't find him, he found me."

"That sounds like an intriguing story."

Will looked around the spotless kitchen with its stainless steel appliances and pure white walls. He held up some of the wrappers and pads from his first aid. “Is there a trash for this sort of thing in here?”

“The bin by the back door there is fine,” Hannibal suggested.

He noticed that Will had changed the subject quickly and wondered about the details of this story about meeting his dog for the first time. A question for another day.

“Guess I oughta get out of your hair now.” Will tugged sheepishly at the pathetic, loose-threaded remnants of his already hideous brown flannel shirt.

The way his cerulean eyes shone behind his cute glasses and his reluctant smiles lit up the room, Hannibal knew it wouldn’t matter what Will wore, he was incapable of looking anything less than gorgeous.

“Unless you’re interested in that free coffee and pastry,” Hannibal replied.

He did his best to be cool, speaking lightly and as if his heart wasn’t set on having more time with the handsome librarian. “Although I must warn you, there’s a significant risk that if you stay any longer and we continue chatting, we might become friends.”

Will chuckled. “Alright, twist my arm. Don’t though, seriously, they’ve been through enough today. Where should I go?”

“I have a favorite table which I keep reserved for special guests. But first…please, let me do something about that rag you are currently trapped in.”

He went to a cabinet nearby and took down a large, but apparently not too heavy box.

Will got a look and noticed, along with happening to observe Hannibal’s strong biceps and forearms flexing in the work as big hands gripped the box, it was full of polo shirts in shades of dark red or cream white. The box actually had to be pretty heavy, but Hannibal lifted it like it was full of feathers. Will wondered why this chef kept himself in such shape, like a fighter. He was kind of jealous; he always meant to work out but rarely got the time.

Although hey, working with the public every day and serving food? It couldn’t hurt to be in fighting shape, just in case. Knowing how often disputes occurred over library materials, Will could only imagine the bitchiness of customers who didn’t like some small or large aspect of their food. Or claimed an order was wrong. People could be pushy, but nobody was going to mess with Hannibal Lecter. Confidence and competence rippled from his demeanor; Will felt so small and lost in life by comparison.

“Well, I guess one of these would be better than…basically an L.L. Bean fabric swatch,” Will admitted with a sigh, looking at the “Red Velvet Cafe” uniform shirts, which all the workers here wore except Hannibal (as manager, he seemed to see fit to wear classy, dressy clothes like today’s crisp, lavender button-up and dark gray trousers. He didn’t have a tie on, so he looked relaxed, but certainly in charge).

“We only use this kitchen for larger catering events,” Hannibal explained cheerfully, handing Will a red polo shirt that did look unusually dapper for a freaking red polo shirt. “You can change in here. I’ll wait for you up front.”

“Okay, thanks, what do I owe you for the shirt?” Will asked.

Truth be told, he’d been about to take off the plaid rag and shrug on the polo without bothering to go into a different room. He just didn’t think anything of changing in front of Hannibal, and this made him marvel at the casual ease he felt in the man’s presence. And Hannibal’s sensitivity in giving him space. Maybe this whole friendship thing wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

“Friends don’t pay for anything in my cafe,” Hannibal insisted with a wink.

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Hannibal led Will to a pleasantly secluded nook of a table in the back of the cafe’s dining area. Instinctively, he’d chosen a location where Will wouldn’t have to deal with a lot of people around.

Still, there were many customers. Will blew on his mug of hot coffee and ventured, “Am I not keeping you from your work? Looks like business is booming.”

“It’s my dinner break,” Hannibal explained. He had chosen a fancy quiche for himself, ham and gruyere with garlic and rosemary.

Like everything behind the counter in the impressive cafe, it looked amazing. Will had picked a pastry at random, intimidated by how many choices there were.

He was unsurprised to find that the decadent concoction on his plate was scrumptious, even making him say “mmm” without meaning to, when delicate puff pastry, custard and dark chocolate melted on his tongue.

“You selected Mille feuille,” Hannibal explained, “it means ‘a thousand leaves.’ Named for its many layers of pastry, though I doubt it was ever made with that many, even in the most indulgent eras of the French monarchy.”

“Funny enough, it looks a little like a book.” Will looked down at the rectangle shape of the dessert, plus the way it had those stripes of pastry, like pages between two chocolate covers.

“So it does. And of course, leaves could refer to pages. Have books always been your great passion?”

Will nodded. “Books, dogs and fishing. Never would have ended up a city boy if it wasn’t for the Library Science M.A. at University of Maryland. My professor got me an internship at Enoch Pratt. And it just seemed so grand. A big enough opportunity to change my plans away from rural living.”

“There’s a lot to be said for rural holidays.” Hannibal stirred sugar and cream into his own coffee in precise amounts by eye.

He had nice eyes, not a dissimilar color from coffee, actually. A cinnamon brown, a bit unusual.

“First I have to get an actual vacation! Won’t have the days built up for months. But you’re right. I should go on a fishing trip once I have time off. Get a little fresh air. Although it sure smells great in here.”

And it did, the fragrance of warm, sugary baked goods turning the place into an absolute escape from the busy, often aggressive city life right outside the red doors. Here, it could be Paris in the 1920’s. Or Florence. Hannibal had quite a variety of Italian pastries, too. Will kept trying to identify the man’s accent, since he usually prided himself on having a good ear for that sort of thing.

“I’m glad you’re taking a short respite from the hustle and bustle.” Hannibal finished his quiche and folded his red cloth napkin, placing it neatly on his plate.

“Uh, I noticed that you have good taste in books,” Will recalled. “The ones you kept for a decade were definitely keepers. Except for being public library property, of course. Among my favorites. Especially Proust.”

Hannibal looked like a deer in headlights for about two seconds. Will wondered if that was the only one of the three books Hannibal hadn’t enjoyed, but then the chef said he loved it as well. And prompted Will to say more about the poetic flow of the stream-of-consciousness novel, almost as if he didn’t know the plot himself since he’d gotten bored by the end of Chapter 1. Will wondered if his amusing suspicions were true, or if Hannibal really had enjoyed *Swann’s Way.*

Will noticed that unlike their first meeting, Hannibal limited the amount of direct eye contact, scaling it back to a more friendly level and getting rid of that whole gazing thing he did at the library. He really did want to be Will’s friend, just for Will? A head-scratcher, but Will found the chef pleasant to spend time with, and life had been so lonely for far too long. Making a connection, even just platonically, felt special. Certainly rare.

Still, he felt it was only right to give Hannibal a little warning of some kind. In case he hadn’t been clear enough on the subject of his own lesser qualities.

“Before you decide to really be friends with me, I think you should know I struggle somewhat socially. I don’t have a gauge that works well enough to tell me when I’m being rude, because a lot of the time my default is to act defensive or be blunt in order to shield myself from potential insults and rejections. So, you know, I can be a lot sometimes, though I don’t mean to be.”

“You should be as much as you are or want to be in my opinion,” Hannibal said firmly.

His hair was different today as well; instead of slicked back, it was soft and free of gel. It fanned across his forehead in all different colors that were natural, but unusual and striking. If you were into that sort of thing, of course.

“Are you implying that I should break the habit of apologizing for my rudeness before it happens?” Will laughed and laid a hand on his heart over the logo of the cafe in scrolling white cursive. “A scandalous concept.”

“I know something about being different in a world which thrives on excluding those of us with special and rare interests, quirks, habits and behaviors.” Hannibal gave an elegant shrug. “By the time I finished university and began my higher level training to become a chef, I had decided to be authentically myself, come what may. I live in dread of wasting my time, spending my life worrying about trivialities.”

“What do you do when a triviality or even an unpleasant person, event or whatever is unavoidable?” Will asked, dubious about this idea of living for the moment, being oneself and…getting away with it? Not being hassled or mocked or reminded of his annoying qualities whenever they manifested?

“I consider discourtesy to be unspeakably ugly,” Hannibal confessed. “I admit that I can hardly put up with such behavior under the best circumstances. When encountering an especially thoughtless and bad-mannered person lacking etiquette and proper consideration for others, I can be quite emphatic in correcting them and putting them in their place.”

Will glanced out the window, where it was a typical weeknight with hordes of people still commuting home and walking at various speeds, playing music loudly, chatting, arguing, generally being…people…and…a crowd.

“Hey,” he laughed, “Eat the rude, right?”

Hannibal seemed especially charmed by this joke of Will’s; his face lit up with a sunny smile as his eyes sparkled. Will noticed that his teeth were pearly white and slightly crooked, but not in a way that detracted from his put-together and impressive appearance; quite the opposite, somehow.

Still, it was kind of a relief to make a connection with someone that was personal but not dating. After all, Will had been out of that game for so long that he was a little worried about going out with a woman who would be impatient or demanding or not compatible sexually, or other stressful qualities. What would he do other than flounder in crazy awkwardness?

Maybe he could ask Hannibal for dating advice when they knew each other better. He might have some ideas, being outgoing and clearly popular, with a lot of prospects for dating, Will was sure.

Wait, but would Hannibal be able to give advice that applied to dating women? Curious, Will worked a question into their “bye for now conversation” before he left.

Hannibal walked him to the door and gave him a to-go bag with a fresh apple muffin for the morning, over Will’s objections. The muffin smelled like actual heaven, so Will took it with him without any further attempts to prevent his new friend from “going all out like that.”

“So, um, you sure have a lot of admirers among the customers,” he noted. “I think some of your female regulars were a little mad at me for taking so much of your time when you could

have been waiting on them for all their…pastry needs."

Hannibal laughed gently. "I'm blessed to have a robust number of regular customers for a relatively modest establishment. If some of them consider me to be part of 'the experience' of Red Velvet cafe, I can't see harm in that, as long as they don't become aggressive about it."

"What if one of them turned out to be really attractive and interesting, though?" Will asked. "Do you…not play for their team? Cause of the, uh…"

"I date people of all genders, Will." Hannibal gave him a mischievous, yet mysterious look. "And I don't mind answering any questions you have about my personal life. I'm an open book. I suppose I'll have a more specific answer to your question about dating a customer if I ever have an opportunity to date one who interests me."

"Cool, that's cool," Will blathered, mildly horrified for being so transparently curious. He was definitely wearing the "new to having a friend" card on his sleeve.

But Hannibal didn't seem to mind.

"I guess I'll see you around, then," he said, gesturing with his phone, since they had exchanged numbers. "Maybe have another coffee or something, or if you come to the library. Don't forget that your newly borrowed books are due in two weeks."

"Perish the thought of returning to a life of book theft and its accompanying infamy," Hannibal answered, not missing a beat.

How was Hannibal so easy to talk to? Did he practice? Or were some people just naturally this smooth and comfortable in their own skin, unafraid of other people in general? Will was a bit jealous again, wishing he could be that calm and content, that pleasant towards others, though he didn't need a gaggle of drooling admirers or a huge friend group or anything. Perish that thought.

"Oh," Will remembered on his way out the door of the cafe, "I keep forgetting to ask. I can't put my finger on your accent. Eastern European?"

"Lithuanian," Hannibal clarified.

"Cool, cool," Will answered, "See you later, then…"

He took himself and his babbled "*cool, cool*" (the *second* one, despite never having used such a dorky remark in his life before) outside into the light Spring drizzle.

It had been really intriguing to learn the origin of Hannibal's accent. The way he pronounced words was different from any voice Will had ever heard, the rhythm of his speaking, the rumbling depth of his voice, yet the musical flow of his words. Instinctual but almost poetic, like a beautiful ribbon unfurling. With a voice like that, Hannibal could have had a career in radio or reading audiobooks.

The thought of audiobooks made Will think, as he got on the train home, he should ask more about what kind of books Hannibal liked when they met up again. The answer would

probably be interesting, full of memorized details and brief, lively anecdotes of past experiences.

“I think I made a friend today, Winston,” Will said when he got home.

He filled the dog’s bowl with the homemade food from his fridge and then took care of the water bowl before sitting down on the couch while Winston chowed down.

“It might have been nice to try something different,” he added reflectively, lying back on the leather couch that had already seen better days before he bought it on Craigslist.

Winston looked over at him with one of those expressions that Will swore made the dog look human for a second.

“Really, I’m not putting you on,” he laughed, “And I haven’t gone crazy. Just out on a limb randomly, I guess.”

Winston came over and settled on the floor near Will, so Will petted him thoughtfully.

Maybe making a potential friend was a first step towards finding a deeper connection someday. That made sense. Although…Will admitted to himself that being friends with Hannibal felt comfortable because he knew it was just a friendship: no matter what happened, he wouldn’t get his heart broken.

that whole...romance...thing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*It's only you who can tell me apart*
And it's only you who can turn my wooden heart"
-Portishead

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Will was sitting behind the Circulation desk looking like a young god, with his glasses slipping absent-mindedly down his nose, vivid eyes caught entirely by the page beneath them. His shining chestnut curls tumbled over his smooth, noble brow. Perfect white teeth cut mercilessly into a plush, pink lower lip as he invested deep thought and fixation into the reading, and slouching posture did nothing to conceal the lines of firm muscle under a pale blue sweater.

Hannibal was grateful to whatever otherwise unfortunate clothier had provided the sweater, with its shoddy, cheap fabric, so thin that he could see Will's biceps to perfection, noticing that as usual, Will's "default setting" was tense. Even when absorbed in his favorite activity, reading, Will's body held itself stiffly. It was equally obvious, from many years of observing human nature with the interest of a monstrous outsider fascinated in small creatures scurrying around at a far distance beneath him, that Will did not have control over his body's tendency to "lock up." But Hannibal also knew this to be true because of his own experience with trauma. He recalled a similar issue that had plagued him for several years after the deaths of his parents and sister when he was only eight years old.

With his teenaged years, Hannibal had learned to block out the horrifying images of the dark days by throwing himself constantly into activity and remaining in easy reach of stimulation. He fed eagerly and greedily on all the decadent, rich and sinful exploits the world offered to his adventurous spirit, but to gaze upon Will was to feel a bizarre, inescapable stillness.

His concern and interest with Will had nothing to do with human sympathy; this was not a capacity he had evidently developed, or else he had shed it along with the rest of his humanity after…what had occurred, in his early childhood. No, this was…his whole busy, self-indulgent bullet train of a life, that tour de force of majestic, no-holds-barred debauched selfishness, pulled to a halt, as locked in place, staring at Will, as Will was locked in anxiety that controlled his very bones and muscles.

He could not observe Will Graham from a lofty, superior distance, and nor was his fascination a "project," "experiment," or other manipulative and often mean-spirited, sadistic, necessarily brief romp such as he had defined all other "intimate" connections in his life to date. The intimacy with Will was no pretentious disguise, the wolf luring another red riding hood to his cave of horrors; the teeth of his own heart were gnawing into his emotions with a frightening, yet exhilarating sort of self-cannibalism, making him taste red, bold and threatening on his tongue, the blood of his own vulnerability.

Waiting for Will seemed to be eating him alive, but it was the only thing Hannibal could do. If he did merely want to play with the boy, it would be easy to draw him into one of the many traps he could brilliantly set and reap the rewarding, merciless and twisted games which it allowed for.

He felt, instead, with an inconvenient throb of need, of protective, possessive and admiring fervor, he would kill anyone who tried to hurt the beautiful librarian.

So how could he even approach the situation as he always did in the past when dealing with comparatively superficial and forgettable attractions? He was delightedly and unrepentantly a villain to the world at large, or at least the large slice of the population who were disgustingly rude pigs. But he could never be the villain of Will's story.

Because above all else, Will loved stories. Hannibal wanted the fairy tale of their romance to be the best story Will ever heard or felt. And he could not harm the only person who now kept him breathing and wanting with this unbearable, yet addictive intensity. It wasn't only that Will was his equal, or that Will was too precious and special to be treated with anything but the most particular and tender care. It was simply that he had found his other half, with the fear that this was a miracle, unlikely enough to have happened to him, and impossible to ever find again. He would not *want* this with anyone else.

His options at this point were limited, due to the platonic establishment of friendship between them and Will's skittishness about even the merest emotional intimacy, his touch-starved, yet insistent tendency to shy away from Hannibal's incidental touch. He always allowed the small shows of friendly affection, which were never more than Hannibal believed *were* only friendly (however more ardently Hannibal felt), a small triumph quickly snuffed out when Will moved away instead of relaxing or reciprocating.

The sweet boy had been vilely mistreated and undervalued over the years, starting in the most innocent origins of life and continuing nearly unaltered to the present day. No wonder Will's body had subconsciously programmed itself to become a fortress for a brilliant, powerful mind. Will's vivid imagination made it easy to escape into his stories and feel the love he could not seek in real life. He was convinced that he was too awkwardly ill-fitted to society ever to find that kind of happy ending, and it fell to Hannibal to show Will how wrong he was.

He would never rest until Will had been loved to the point of smothering, ecstatic exhaustion and then finally relaxed, finally enjoyed his life and freed his own dark, gorgeously devilish nature to roam the world and stain it with blood by Hannibal's side.

They saw each other a couple of times a week, aside from whenever Hannibal made some excuse to drop by the library.

These were all-too-fleeting, but wonderful times doing such simple activities which once Hannibal turned his nose up at: sharing a meal, introducing Will to the eclectic dinner fare he served in his own home, then walking Will to the door with no kiss or even an embrace, but rather a brief pat to his back.

Or seeing a film together with Hannibal's hand itching to reach for the one that would only flinch confusedly away.

When they went bowling and Will showed Hannibal the best stance for knocking all the pins down at once, the younger man had shadowed him from behind and guided his position, the closest they had ever been, physically. Will's touch, even through his clothing, set fire to Hannibal and made him burn with tense, shocking cravings for more throughout the whole rest of the evening.

Drinking terrible beer and playing a silly game which was admittedly rendered more than endearing when Will enjoyed it with transparent, wholesome glee. Watching as Will let his shoulders fall a bit more easily and held his breath less often. Will, finding that eye contact and speaking in an unsuspicious tone free from flint and the grit of self-protecting quips was quite possible with his new friend. Such irreplaceable, unforgettable sights.

Hannibal went home and sketched Will's intoxicating grins and shining eyes, knowing he could drink stale, cheap beer and wear ugly rented shoes forever to see that again, as often as possible. Being the one to give Will a chance to smile was special all by itself; getting him to smile only because of what he had said or done in his presence was finer than gold or any other treasure.

Hannibal did not know how much longer he could stand holding back. He had obviously never been in any position to know unrequited desire, and this was getting back fifty years of accrued romantic and sexual frustration, the potential prelude of broken-hearted despair. So he had to learn now, in baby steps, which must or should be darkly humorous, despite Hannibal's inability to find it funny in the least.

The entertainment he once derived from the suffering of others who he considered his little pawns and playthings had been replaced by his own agonizing ordeal of waiting to have the one person he loved.

He was not even entirely convinced that "heterosexuality" was what kept Will from seeing him romantically or sexually. It felt more immediately that this was just one more easy assumption, among many, which Will had happened upon without really ever experiencing enough of adult dating to know for sure. Another layer of dismissive protection, cutting out a big part of the population who might hurt him if he were to "go there" and potentially fall in love, only to meet with eventual and horrifying heartbreak. Will was honest enough in his pessimism, which had somehow come to define his whole worldview, anytime he was not poring over a classic novel or book of dreamy poetry.

How could Will know himself when some of the armored forts he had constructed in his mind to shelter his vulnerability were forts that kept him out of the deeper layers he held within? He could not feel with a soul he kept imprisoned.

Sadness for Will's tormented and yet stoically inhabited and accepted young life was a startling and novel enough sensation. That desire and possessiveness chased it like the hot, exciting rush of a quick shot of strong liquor set him even more off-balance.

But he was a determined man by nature. He had never been so determined in all his life, and this, *Will Graham,* to be with the boy and possess him utterly, to be Seen, accepted and adored equally, this was what he wanted as he had never wanted anything. His success might not be fully guaranteed, but it was certain he'd never give up.

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Hannibal knew that the combined tenseness and messy posture must give Will terrible muscle aches, and his own hands felt an ache in response, a wish to give a long and indulgent massage. His fantasies concocted a delightful reverie of allowing his hands to wander, in which case he supposed Will really need not wear clothing…such lovely, inspiring images. The dreams of Will's surrender and the soft, helpless moans which those rosy, delicious, tempting lips would let fly…

On a body like that, and with such sensitive responsiveness, such touch-starved restlessness, clothes were overrated, whether the most exquisite designer attire or the Old Navy "chic" currently adorning the object of Hannibal's every wicked desire. Hannibal would love nothing more than to taste the boy all over, with long, pain-staking teasing, to drive Will to a distraction of heady arousal with expert and savoring licks and bites, building to caresses and then to gropes, gradually growing urgent and rough…

He felt sweat on his upper lip and turned slightly pink, needing a moment to maintain his own calm exterior. Standing in the lobby near the magazines and brochure selections, with patrons coming in and out through the smooth automatic doors, Hannibal felt out of sorts, but this never undercut his laser-sharp focus on the task at hand. A still-developing plan for introducing Will's reluctant heart to so many incredible thrills and delights.

He added a little variation or course alteration as needed here and there, the better he got to know Will, his preferences and annoyances, his needs, whether admitted or denied. But he was now at another "friend zone" impasse requiring a new path to get to the one who held his heart.

Every now and again, as Hannibal watched for a few minutes under the pretense of "Browsing the New Books Section," the low-level buzz of patron chatter would rise in volume enough that Will hissed "shhhh!," although his intense gaze never traveled from the words he perused with complete immersion.

Are you still trying to escape the real world, Will? I love you for that. There are so many more ways to do that than you know, and yet no one ever made reading appear more seductive and tantalizing.

Finally, due to the box of pastries he was holding, Hannibal could hardly delay approaching his beloved much longer. It was silly to continue the "browsing" when he did not even have a hand free to pick up one of the idiotic-looking bestsellers and "read" the doubtless inane back cover blurb. Playing it cool was indeed a strange experience for a man who was usually incomparably cool simply by breathing.

"Good morning, Circulation staff," Hannibal announced softly, in his charming, silky voice, making sure he addressed himself not only to Will, but also to the beautiful boy's co-workers.

This made him seem less obsessed, a necessary deception only for the time being.

Once Will was safely in his clutches, there would be no need for such repression of the love that flowed so naturally.

Of course, the elderly ladies who worked the morning shift with Will were all in love with Hannibal; they flocked to him now like birds flying south for winter, gravitating to the warm fascination of this sophisticated, handsome man who was not only all of that, but also owned a bakery.

This was apparently the finishing touch which could catapult 99% of the human population into helpless infatuation with Hannibal. After all, one must never underestimate the power of "And he can cook."

But to Will Graham, this was only a visit from his platonic friend and business neighbor. "Oh, hi, Hannibal," Will said distractedly.

It took him several prolonged seconds to fully pull himself out of the world of his book. He set it down on the counter and Hannibal noticed that it was Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina.*

Excellent. So, the boy liked a good, brutally dark love story. There was a real-life one hurtling towards him as fast as the fatal train which met Anna, but such a dangerous encounter was sure to bring Will glorious rebirth, not a horrific demise.

Hannibal gave the whole crew a mischievous smile; yet once his eyes landed on Will, it was impossible to tear them away. He was as mentally and emotionally glued to this angel as Will was to his beautifully sad Russian literature.

"I hope you all like dark chocolate," he said, presenting the elegant red box from his cafe.

"Oh, really?" Will's interest in the pastries grew exponentially.

There were a variety of types, including eclairs, cream puffs and pain au chocolat, but the unifying theme was Will's favorite flavor.

"Which one is this?" Will asked once the initial flurry of interest and pastry-excitement had died down and his co-workers had drifted elsewhere. He gestured to the pain au chocolat, giving a quiet but sharp laugh when Hannibal told him the name.

"Ha. Sounds about right," he smirked, selecting that one and cradling it respectfully, despite his cynical attitude.

"Pain in this context does not mean –" He knew Will knew. Knew Will heard him pronounce it "pan," with his perfect French accent. But he wanted to prompt Will to say more.

"Oh, I know." Will took a small nibble, then licked his lips with an approving half-smile. "It means 'bread' in French. But when you think about it, in good ol' American, *painful chocolate* makes sense. Most of the time, people eat chocolate to soothe their hurt feelings. And if you eat too much, well that hurts, too."

Hannibal enjoyed the way Will took any given topic and batted it around like a cat with a toy, pulling it intellectually this way and that, mixing inconsolably bleak amusement with an undercurrent of stormy discontent.

“In moderation, dark chocolate is actually recommended by medical professionals,” Hannibal pointed out. “Even as a daily treat.”

The check-out desk that separated them felt like a thousand miles sometimes; not being close to Will was bad enough; Hannibal had to block out his deeply detailed visions of skin to skin, or they’d never be able to converse.

“Mmm, yeah. Antioxidants and all that,” Will acknowledged. “But even so, I couldn’t eat something like this every day. It’s an occasional treat. Or the pain would be considerable… ha. I’m not a gym rat like you, I need to watch my waistline.”

Hannibal blinked slowly at him. “You actually believe that? I swim, incidentally, my favorite form of exercise, or one of them.”

This subtly sensuous response was as far as he dared tread into flirtation. Will let it pass with a mere raise of his brows.

“Believe what?” Will scoffed. “That eating the rich, decadent fare you craft so amazingly at your lovely cafe would ruin whatever basically decent shape I’ve kept myself in? I’m pretty sure that's an indisputable fact.”

Hannibal used the advantageous topic to look with greater interest and longer gazing than he usually allowed in Will’s presence. The younger man was in absolutely perfect shape, without realizing it at all.

His waist was slim, his ass improbably plump, pert and utterly delicious-looking considering his slender frame. Furthermore, most likely from years of continuously shelving or carrying books in his work, his muscles were firm and toned. He was the perfect combination of strong but delicate, with the only curves on his stunning body the ones that tempted Hannibal exceedingly, including as well his shapely thighs and a tiny curve just above his waistband that begged to be bitten.

“Well, enjoy *this* pastry without self-blame, at least,” Hannibal suggested. He gave Will a different look, just ever so slightly stern. Lightly teasing, but clearly implying that he’d much prefer Will to obey him. “If I bestow a gift upon my friend, it is my hope it will be savored in the spirit of the giving. And I wanted you to have something sweet, an uplifting little morsel to brighten your morning. Do you mind indulging me?”

Will shrugged, belying the darkening flush on his cheeks. “May as well. Uh. Thanks; before we met, I didn’t have anyone but Winston to stop me anytime I start turning stuff into reasons I’m the worst, then ruminating on that until I go insane.”

He clearly felt disoriented by how much Hannibal cared for him. Even that Hannibal noticed him and kept up such a persistent flow of their get-togethers confused Will to the point of adding another, more mysterious and promising layer to his nerves. This was the fragile

beginning of desire, building itself with ethereal breaths of light and pleasure in Will, but Will did not recognize it as anything more than "the surprise of having a real friend."

Hannibal chuckled. "And Winston isn't always around."

The boy returned the laugh. His eyes twinkled, prettier than sun-glistening cerulean ocean waves. "Yeah. When he *is* around, he can really only give me 'cut it out' looks and make a few assorted whining noises. Occasionally, the quiet accusing bark."

Mildred, one of Will's morning co-workers, passed by on her way to wait on a patron who had approached the desk with a few books and DVD's to borrow. The petite lady with a purplish-gray high bun and matching glasses frames observed Will's bright smile and slightly more relaxed, natural demeanor with surprise, nodding at Hannibal in encouragement of this, without needing to elaborate.

Hannibal glowed at that, such a tiny boost but helpful, to know others could see how Will changed when around him. He was pleased with this progress. Other people could see the positive influence he had on Will and read deeper meaning into the connection, even if Will was not quite there yet.

It was apparent that "pastries in the morning" were not going to be an acceptable premise for dropping by the library on a daily basis. If Will only cared for bakery fare (admittedly, Hannibal's cooking was indeed very rich and sinfully caloric) on occasion, he must come up with different excuses. A varied set of reasons for suddenly, "coincidentally" appearing in range of Will and subtly continuing his careful courtship would be ideal.

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He came back the following afternoon, carrying another few books which he had checked out the day they met. On purpose, he had allowed the two-week due date deadline to come and go while the literature lay prone on his home office desk. Hannibal hadn't even paid attention to the books themselves when he chose them, as at the time it had only been another excuse to go to Circulation. He'd been irritated to find that Will was on his thirty-minute break, but that was not the case now.

He had been so uncharacteristically absent-minded in grabbing books that later that night, when he realized what silly and odd "choices" he had made in a hasty attempt to see Will again, in the first flush of deep infatuation, he chuckled and shook his head.

"I'm afraid I've been negligent of the red rubber stamp again," Hannibal apologized with complete insincerity as Will entered the books back into the computer system, holding each under the pink glow of his scanner with a dubious expression.

As the lovely creature glanced down at the vapid self-help book (how did so many people keep thinking the latest author had unearthed a new *7 Steps to a Whole New, Sexy, Powerful You and Unlocking the Universe Within*?), an equally shallow, even despicable "celebrity memoir" (*From Tabloid Trash to Fame and Fortune (with no regrets)* by Freddie Lounds), and a predictable, weirdly gentle and cutesy murder mystery which was eventually "solved"

by a pet teacup pig (*Murder at Squiggly Tail Inn*), Hannibal regretted his thoughtless selection.

In his haste to get back to Will under the most flimsy pretenses, he had failed to consider that these titles would not impress a true book-lover such as his darling, if Will happened to wait on him when he returned the embarrassing smorgasbord of wasted paper.

"Were they any good at least?" Will placed them on the cart beside him and typed his way to Hannibal's card records. He looked convinced that none of them would, in fact, have been any good.

"Well. I certainly would not have anticipated the tiny pig's capacity for cracking murder cases," Hannibal responded with good humor, the only lubricant to ease the friction of their apparently opposing, if not incompatible, literary taste. "Although she is named 'Holmesie.'"

Under normal circumstances, his reading preferences ran quite similarly to Will's, that of classics, or else fancy cookbooks for new recipe ideas, or history, art, the finer things. Not "Holmesie" and her little deerstalker cap.

It would not require any deception for him to be more accurate in mentioning this to the boy. He would pepper in some more honest descriptions of his favorite books as soon as possible.

But the joke was well-placed. Will actually *giggled,* a new sound which knocked Hannibal off his feet yet again. Will's really full, sweet laugh, one which erupted helplessly from his heart, was a gorgeous sound. Hannibal struggled to fathom the boy not knowing he was the most stunning person in the world, of all time, but Will was indeed oblivious.

Will held his stomach as tears of amusement gathered in his eyes. "That book somehow sounds both better and much, much worse than I'd imagined."

"Yes, I think that covers it," Hannibal answered.

His grin was irrepressible when seeing Will laugh that way. He felt even warmer and happier than usual, when with Will, and that was really saying something.

"Okay, okay…" Will made himself stop laughing and addressed the screen with as much dignity as he could conjure. "You do owe a dollar, sorry."

"It's no trouble. I'm happy to donate to such a wonderful cause as this fine institution."

Hannibal allowed himself the small but profound pleasure of letting the real meaning of this statement filter briefly through his light words. The illumination that fell on his desperate love for the librarian might have shown for about three seconds before he covered it up again, anxious to remain "Friendly" afterwards. Let Will come to him, no matter how many strange reasons he must find to come to the library, no matter how patient he must be with the boy's self-deceptions of "heterosexuality" and resisting Hannibal's more suggestive charms.

Will's eyes rested on Hannibal's own intent amber gaze for a little longer than usual. The older man's heart skipped a beat, then galloped. Will's sapphire oceans were unreadable,

fringed in long, dark lashes of which an elegant doe would be envious. He was intrigued, unoffended and slightly confused, that was all Hannibal could gather from the brief eye contact. It was rare for Will to maintain it for quite that long, at least. Quite promising. Hannibal left with a pleased smile despite his continual ache for more.

However, profitable as this enterprise had been, Hannibal could not continue returning his books late, as it was not believable for a man of his meticulous and organized lifestyle. And it made a sloppy impression on the strictly rule-following librarian who had captivated the murderous chef. So he must find yet more excuses for the all-important library visits.

It wasn't as if waiting for their occasional "Friend Outings" was giving Hannibal enough of Will. He could barely survive on such tiny amounts, and would take additional, small sustaining nourishment from seeing Will more, more, any time he possibly could.

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That neat, bland row of posters and free newsletters by the front entrance and its automatic sliding doors served as a welcoming invitation. Hannibal paused beside it the next afternoon, having had to rely on "bringing coffee" to the staff as an excuse this time. It felt too contrived to him, even as he did it, although Will was pleasantly surprised and baffled as ever, which was always adorable.

There were apparently many clubs and "Events" which took place regularly in service of the community. The free forms of entertainment and ways of meeting like-minded folks ranged from book clubs of nearly every genre, to a concert series, film screenings/discussions, a gardening club, plus arts and crafts, then even more. Hmm. Useful.

Hannibal availed himself of the free literature with a singular mental flourish of deliberate, emphatic satisfaction.

Hannibal Lecter, sought-after Baltimore socialite of the highest standing, a regular at the opera, the symphony and art museums, was thrilled about…the Scrapbooking Club. Because it meant he could see his Will, and that made it better than Carmen, Chopin or Van Gogh could ever aspire to be.

He must reward himself with strengthened confidence and re-inflated ego whenever these small victories arrived, or he'd lose hope, which would never do.

That night, he reorganized his planner so that he had penciled in a library event at least twice a week for the foreseeable future. He hoped that it would not be necessary to continue this charade into summer, as he was not sure he could stomach the boring hobbies and doubtless mind-numbing opinions of the local library patrons for much longer than a few weeks.

For now, as it benefited his plan so enormously, he could be patient and feign interest as need be. It occurred to him that obviously, his already thriving community of Hannibal Admirers would grow in number with each club he joined, giving him a natural, unsuspicious-looking path to making Will jealous. Hopefully.

Then, Hannibal's schedule was so active that he was monumentally busy, with nearly all of his non-work hours spent either going to the library for a meeting, or else getting ready to do so. There were a few measures included in the latter, as Hannibal must look his absolute best to see Will. While always – of course – conveying the impeccable impression that this was "just how he dressed."

He had been upping the ante of his already extravagant wardrobe of late, but giving it a certain casual-sexy flourish which he thought would be more appealing to Will than his usual suits. Dressing down gave him the opportunity to show off his fit, impressive body even more and avoid intimidating Will with his sartorial formality at the same time.

Of course, the expenditure on so many new outfits was nothing. Running the cafe was merely a glorified hobby, as he was wealthy enough never to work unless he cared to. The fact of his status as Lithuanian aristocracy, just one notch below actual royalty, was one which Hannibal had so far omitted in his discussions with the boy, so that Will would not be frightened away given his often flippant dismissal of "rich people."

But Hannibal was a people person and had to live in the world, making connections, sharing the feast he had to offer. So he worked when he did not need to, and with great gusto. Boredom irritated him as much as the banal, which (since it was annoyingly ubiquitous) so often fed into it by emptying his hungry senses and starving him of joy or interest.

Furthermore, it was part of the always-moving, always-busy of his life, which kept him in motion often enough before Will with his work, his hobbies of music and art, and the hunt, with its accompanying, increasingly elaborate tableaux.

These days, he was finding little time to do anything at all that did not have to do with Will, and anytime he went too far away from "about Will," he quickly found a way to work a Will-related mind tangent into the activity.

Work was clouded by countless dreams of Will, summoned like swirling sugar in his tea and pastel-colored, tiny sprinkles on his popular "birthday cake cookies."

He only killed to pay homage to his passionate obsession, the same for his many portraits of Will and the abandoned corpses of harpsichord odes which he decided in the end were pathetically unworthy of the man who inspired them.

(Count) Hannibal Lecter had a limitless clothing budget, but it still took a large amount of time to try on all of the potential outfits for each encounter, and sometimes to have items specifically tailored to his figure.

He was also swimming more often, adding in an extra late-night session anytime he did not get his second round of fitness from hunting. Between one new activity and another, Hannibal had never been so tired; yet sleep did not come easy since meeting Will. It might be the inevitable awareness that sleep would never be so appealing again until he could have Will in his arms.

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One Friday night, Hannibal had closed the bakery for the evening after changing from his

work clothes into his…Will clothes. He swiftly headed down the street to the library, a thin box of small plastic letters held in one hand, cool and casual as could be.

A pair of gray slacks, a white polo shirt that cost enough to buy the library itself, and an open, navy blue blazer constituted this evening's attire. As to his premise for coincidentally being in Will's workplace yet again?

"Hannibal?" Will was taking down a display of Spring-themed books in the front lobby, getting ready to put up the Summer recommendations. He saw Hannibal as soon as the older man went striding ever so serenely by.

"Oh, I didn't see you there," Hannibal smiled, "Good evening, Will. The display looks marvelous thus far."

"Thanks," Will shrugged. "What brings you by? No hot date on a Friday night?"

"Only one, and it's the one I've been looking forward to all week." Hannibal let that sit for a calculated few seconds before leaning in slightly and revealing the box he had brought with him.

"*Scrabble?*" Will almost dropped some pushpins he'd been using on an Announcement bulletin board. "*You*?"

"Of course. Now, to my understanding the Scrabble Club should be convening in Meeting Room 2, is that correct?"

"It…is…." Will seemed puzzled.

Was Will's overwhelmingly confused expression entirely due to Hannibal's surprising enthusiasm for board games, or how his outfit hung from his body, how he slowly licked his lips? "Perhaps I'll see you on the way out, my friend."

Will nodded, "See you on the other side of all those…Triple Word Scores."

"Will, please." Hannibal clucked his tongue, then smirked. "Don't jinx me. One can only hope."

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The *Scrabble* was weird enough. But then the following week, Will almost walked right into Hannibal, who was now making his way cheerfully for Meeting Room 1. The librarian checked his watch. 7pm on the dot.

"You're here for *Mindfulness Monday*?" Will looked over a large stack of old books in need of repair which he was carrying, baffled that Hannibal dressed like he was on his way to a magazine fashion shoot, just to sit in a library with *Jim, Reuben, Maisie and Libby*, pondering the "depths of quiet."

"Namaste Day, Will," Hannibal said, eyes twinkling, before sashaying towards the assigned meeting room.

A few nights later, Will was checking some books out to patrons when he noticed Hannibal strolling around carrying a basket full of yarn, slender steel hooks with pastel plastic handles, and a pair of scissors. “Hey. Hannibal.”

Hannibal heard Will’s whispered greeting and came up to the desk with a delighted expression. “How wonderful to see you, Will. Has it been a good day?”

“You’re here for…the Crochet Club?” Will asked, staring at the neat bundles of yarn, arranged in a perfect color spectrum.

By this time, Hannibal was a hard man to flag down when in the library. He had accumulated fans and followers from all his clubs, and even strangers who he struck friendly up conversations with while browsing library materials.

The whole staff knew and loved him, except Jeanie, who actually had taken an unannounced leave and apparently headed on vacation, leaving Will the only supervisor of the Circulation department. He now had twice the work but half the daily exhaustions of a mean and nagging co-worker. It pretty much evened out. At least now the work could all be done properly, to Will’s own high standards of perfectionism and love of the library.

“You are a man of many unexpected interests and talents,” Will observed, right before some of Hannibal’s admirers arrived to quietly chat him up, surrounding him like a swarm of teenagers jumping on a boy band’s limo.

Will could not imagine what it would be like to draw people to him magnetically, or have all the regular patrons and staff of a city public library in love with him and hanging on his every word. He wasn’t jealous of the attention, or even Hannibal’s social skills, or at least, not much. He somehow resented all those hangers-on for different reasons.

After all, Hannibal was *his* friend. It wasn’t cool that they kept interrupting Hannibal and Will’s conversations. Hannibal didn’t know them. He certainly didn’t *like* any of them, these intruders. Not the way he liked Will.

I met him first. This was a thought that flickered into a small flame of irritated social jealousy in Will’s mind. He didn’t think anything else of it.

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Hannibal’s library visits were not limited to evenings; occasionally, Will would run into him during the day, as Hannibal apparently had some mornings off. This had already been established with Film Club, but was growing more frequent. Hannibal made his own hours, after all.

On one such Tuesday morning, Will saw Hannibal talking to a lady from a book club outside the meeting room, right before the group’s monthly discussion was to begin.

She was an elegant, older woman with a sleek, dark bob and an intelligent, highly social, chatty attitude. Will never caught her name but was used to seeing her at Tuesday Book Club.

Now, she and Hannibal were chatting like best friends as she briefly touched his arm to emphasize a point.

With an indefinable, strangely possessive, sort of…*negatively curious* feeling, Will crossed the front lobby, passing by the magazine rack despite the fact that several issues of *Sports Illustrated* and *Newsweek* had been put back in the wrong date order (this normally would have been impossible to walk past without fixing it). He made his way over to his friend and forced a pleasant expression as best he could. It ended up as a half-smile with bitter fluctuations.

"Mrs. Komeda, this is my very good friend, Will Graham," Hannibal said with his usual coolness and with an eye-catching outfit (as usual), a tight, light peach polo shirt (spotless – Will could never wear pale clothes like that, he'd just spill food or coffee on them – he felt jealous of his friend's effortless style yet again), dark blue trousers and a caramel-colored cardigan tied around his shoulders.

Will was wondering why Hannibal looked so badass in clothes that a "preppie" would wear in an eighties comedy movie and hence he'd missed what was apparently an ongoing introduction.

So, he answered the questioning looks of Hannibal and his friend, Mrs. Something, by putting his hand out and saying "Will Graham. Good to officially meet you."

Now, it was somewhat bizarre he should speak his name with such almost defiant confidence. After all, Will normally introduced himself so that it sounded more like an apology for his existence; it was just knee jerk etiquette for him at this point. But with Mrs. Whatever, he just didn't care for her closeness and presumptuous flitting around Hannibal like a creepy hummingbird stalking a rare, exotic flower.

Will just felt...well, *protective* of Hannibal. Poor guy, Hannibal only wanted to attend a few meetings for the activities they included, and he was nearly having to beat people off with a stick, so frequent were the patrons' attempts to befriend him or get a date.

"Mrs. Komeda is a friend of mine from the board committee for the Baltimore Opera's annual charity gala," Hannibal explained brightly.

"Who'd have thought he would be a book club member, am I right, Will? I never would have guessed you had time. What did you think, by the way?" Mrs. Komeda showed her hardcover copy of *The House We Never Called Home* by Iris Binshee-McGill and made a sour face. "I couldn't finish it."

"It did seem a bit anticlimactic to spend the whole book rooting for the alcoholic son to recover and make peace with the family, only for the worst outcome to follow," Hannibal recalled. "I also found that the author's talent for description far outweighed her skill in dialogue and plotting."

"She should change careers," Will suggested boldly, making a joke with a strangely insistent tone. "And write travel brochures."

Mrs. Komeda, Hannibal's pre-existing friend (how dare she), did not appear to see through Will's extremely thin veneer of politeness to the storm within, and hence laughed merrily as Hannibal did the same.

"Yes, that would be perfect," Mrs. Komeda said with a hand lightly pressed over her heart. "Hand to God, boys, I'm never letting Edna pick the next month's book again. It *is* possible to be a little *too* nice, and it's better not to forget that when kindness tries to sabotage common sense."

"Excellent advice," Hannibal smiled, but although he did agree, this smile seemed dimmer than the dazzling one that had followed Will's joke.

Mrs. Komeda announced excitedly, "I have a great opportunity for you, Hannibal, hear me out on this. A vegetable gardening workshop here at the library. You'd be a *perfect* leader. I've heard quite a few requests for one from patrons at not only Tuesday morning book club, but also the Cozy Murder Mystery Club and the Romance of the Month Club. No one knows more about growing fine produce than you."

"I would be delighted," said Hannibal with a proud-looking smile.

Yet in his intriguing, cinnamon-coffee eyes, Will saw a mysterious play of light, a look that seemed to carry deeper meaning, as if he had some ulterior motive for such a wholesome undertaking. How could a *vegetable gardening workshop*, of all things, imply any deep meaning or secret reasons?

Mrs. Komeda went into the meeting room to chat with some other book club members, and Will lingered outside in the corridor with Hannibal, looking at the older man's pale peach sleeve instead of touching his smooth, golden-tanned arm to get his attention.

"Hey, why do you really come to all these library events?" Will raised his eyebrows. "This place has got to be eating up most of the time you have outside of work for a social life, and nobody would exactly call it *thrilling*."

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Hannibal tilted his head slightly with a complicated smile as he considered answers to Will's question.

I come here to see you, as often as I can, even for a few minutes or from across the room, even through the meeting room window that is near enough to your desk to let me watch you working. I can stare at your eyes, your jawline, your sweet lips and your beautiful body moving and feel an appetizer's worth of nourishment. I watch your lips forming words and try to read them to know what you're saying. I feel jealous of everyone else who approaches and talks with you.

I also knew that I would garner a "fanbase" by making myself a regular fixture here, and hoped the inevitable hangers-on would make you jealous.

He held this speech inside and said with perky enthusiasm, “I enjoy being part of the community, and even having a chance to give back. There are so many delightful activities occurring here, often free of charge, every week. I became fascinated by the variety of events and have been thoroughly impressed with each one I have sampled.”

“Even *Crochet Club*?” Will asked doubtfully.

“Be nice, Will, or no blanket under the Christmas tree for you. Mind you, it may take me that long to perfect a crocheted blanket, but like most new skills, I trust I will get there in time.”

“Why do I somehow highly doubt that you suck at anything you set your mind to, even at first?” Will asked with a laugh.

It was…soothing, knowing someone this well, Will reflected. Shiny, new, comforting. Something…someone to try and hold onto for once.

He really saw right through Hannibal sometimes, like no one else could. Hannibal kept it to himself that Will had been totally right about his immediate talent with crocheting. In fact, Hannibal had not only finished the blanket which had been his first piece, but he’d gotten a bit bored and restless late at night recently, longing for Will. Consequently, he’d since knitted a pair of mittens and a winter hat as well, before experimenting with crocheted book covers. All of it was, of course, lovingly crafted for Will. If he only had Winston's proportions, he could make a sweater for the dog as well; he would have to ask to see pictures soon to figure it out.

***

After this excruciatingly careful, slow courtship, where Hannibal put himself on the line as he did for no other nor ever would again if it were not Will, the tension finally snapped.

But he would never have predicted it, as this time he was completely oblivious and innocent of trying to catch Will’s attention or make the librarian want him. It happened anyway.

“Oh! Mr. Lecter,” said the Children’s Department librarian Peg, hurrying over to Hannibal one morning when he had just exited a meeting and wanted to stop by the front desk to see Will before making himself leave. “*Psst!*”

“Good morning, Peg,” Hannibal said, puzzled by her urgency. “May I do anything for you?”

“Yes. We have no less than twenty youngsters gathered in our meeting room, and our weekly Storytime reader just called out sick. Can you do me the hugest favor and come sub in? All you have to do is read a book to the kids. You do have a lovely voice and I know you’d be fantastic. The kids would just love it!”

Even if there was no Will (perish the thought), Hannibal still would always have acquiesced to such enjoyable flattery and the chance to show off in any way. He did consistently throw in a small “oh, I couldn’t *possibly*”, which he got out of the way now.

“Mr. Lecter, c’mon, I really need help here.” Peg, who was in her thirties with two blonde braids and a Dr. Seuss t-shirt tucked into a sunshine-yellow corduroy skirt, looked unusually desperate, implying that the Storytime regulars were unlikely to react well with no reader. “They’ll be bored to tears if it’s only me reading, they can have that anytime.”

“Alright, alright, Peg, worry not,” Hannibal chuckled amiably. “One extra special storytime coming right up. Please, lead the way.”

***

Will had a cart full of books to shelve, wanting to personally make sure a new collection of YA Reading List books were attractively and clearly arranged. This brought him to a series of display cases and shelves right outside the Children’s Department meeting room, the door of which was open.

A familiarly husky and silken tone of voice with a masculine rumble that registered in his low belly made Will turn around, astonished to see his one and only friend Hannibal… leading the kid’s Storytime?!

Will almost dropped the books he was holding; instead, he put them aside and stood outside the room, looking in and listening intently without Hannibal noticing he was there. The children, ranging in age from four to ten, were gazing up at the handsome chef and listening raptly. Will had never seen this age group so well-behaved due to their interest being incredibly well-captured. The new reader was the best they’d ever heard.

He had to admit, they were damn right. He watched as his elegant, sophisticated friend took a pair of cute reading glasses from his shirt pocket (a hunter green polo with snug-fitting tan pants that day, two leather bracelets winding around one of his strong wrists) and put them on, concentrating on the book in his hands before commencing his thoughtful narration.

“*Chapter One,*” Hannibal began, in a voice like pure, honeyed gold had begun slowly, luxuriously dripping onto the air itself, sinking into Will’s pores and all five senses at once.

“*The Wrong Door.*” He gave the children a coy, “how intriguing" wink that made everyone laugh quietly, and then he continued, reading the words of C.S. Lewis with fluid ease and yet with such feeling. They had surely never sounded so magical, even transcendently so.

“*This is a story about something that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child. It is a very important story because it shows how all the comings and goings between our own world and the land of Narnia first began…*”

Will felt dizzy. Hannibal’s voice, his fucking – oh, God, *his voice*, such beautiful reading. One was not supposed to feel this way listening to stories of Narnia, surely. What the hell had come over him?

He felt the words in his bones and written on his heart, he felt the story lift off the page with every syllable as affection and admiration made his heart swell. And he let himself sink into fascinated, enthralled, immersive examination of every single detail that made up Hannibal’s voice.

There was Hannibal's accent, which was lush, with soft, but playful or determined annunciations and stresses. Will closed his eyes, words drifting from Hannibal's lips to drench him in sweet pleasure, until he shivered with how good it felt, listening, really letting himself just *listen* like this. To stop, fully, and let it happen.

No doubt, Hannibal's remarkable voice had always interested Will; from the first night of their friendship he had admired and recalled it with a certain fixation that – until now – had never found an accurate label in his mind. His brain was so unaccustomed to the feelings taking him over, that it took a real shock to his system, in this case getting high on pleasure from listening to Hannibal's voice applied to the art of storytelling, to understand.

Hannibal's accent, posh and intelligent, highly educated but with a tiny hesitation when he translated from Lithuanian to English constantly. That heavy little work he must be doing in every sentence he said astounded Will, because Hannibal was incredibly eloquent, and now – because he read with a soothing, calming, yet…even…with…Will looked down at himself. The thread of his thoughts had stopped making sense, as if it had gone spinning right off the spool, and he was unable at first to understand what was happening.

He was getting *hard.* Hannibal's voice was fucking *sexy.* It was like sultry ASMR dipped in dark chocolate, chased by a glass of velvety red wine, and finally finished off with a hard, demanding kiss from the lips framing those exquisite words.

Will moaned under his breath and struggled not to touch himself, that was how fast he got hard and how long it had been since another "real life" person made him get an erection. He was so incredibly starved for this that he almost felt like he would faint or even die, and the only thing keeping him in one piece as his trousers got tighter and his cock filled out insistently, was that. *Voice.* Wrapped around him like a ribbon, sweetly vice-tight, gripping and squeezing him until he was breathless with joy and erotic need.

Hannibal…that really subtle, adorable lisp he had. The way Will knew he'd spent a considerable amount of time in the UK because of certain words which he was used to speaking with a gently rounded and more British pronunciation. The depth of Hannibal's tone, the decadent, manly and throaty rasp that somehow accompanied all that sophistication and even the cute, kind way he had specifically approached this reading, with such a young audience. He was reading, unmistakably to the kids, but every adult in the vicinity was hypnotically listening to him as well.

Will almost panicked as he looked around at the other grown-ups, hating them for getting to listen. With the kids, it was fine, they were no…threat…*what*? His mind reeled as his heart thundered. In fact, the domestic, paternal way Hannibal addressed the children made the chef even more attractive.

It was like everything in Will which had ever craved a lover and stomped the desire down, thinking it was an impossible, embarrassing wish, came rushing back all at once. Even the silly, absurd dream of marriage, a house and kids, more dogs, contentment and love, so much love. Hannibal's voice contained all of that and more.

This man was opposite extremes, raining fire and ice, but when it was Hannibal, it all made sense. Upside down was right side up.

Everything about Hannibal gave off confidence, competence, manly vigor, sensuous and smooth style, teasing, exciting handsomeness, a fascinating, mysterious, elegant danger Will could barely fathom, because he knew it was there and it made him feel safe instead of scared. Safer than anything else. He usually *never* felt safe. Hannibal's voice held him as an embrace now, rocking him as the malicious waves of self-doubt and hatred of any perceived rival threatened to ruin Will's initially euphoric realization.

Tearing his angry eyes from the besotted onlookers, Will looked back at Hannibal, with his silvery blonde hair, so soft and beautiful, his amazing amber eyes, unusual and deep. His *body*, dammit, fucking…oh *God*. Will breathed slowly, trying to calm down while his feelings and cravings kept exploding so suddenly. Contents no longer under pressure.

Hannibal was *built*, he was solid, with broad shoulders and a muscular physique, biceps rippling and gorgeous pectorals obvious under that should-be-illegal little polo shirt from his apparent collection of such attire. His lashes were long, but pale, and so pretty, his cheekbones sharply stunning, lips so damn kissable and perfect. Those little crinkles beside his eyes when he smiled and laughed, so endearing Will wanted to kiss them, too. Hannibal's beautiful, strong neck and how it moved slightly when he spoke, and his big, gorgeous hands, lined in veins under skin as golden-tanned and pretty as the rest of him.

Will had to speed right past the bisexual awakening that had – he now realized – been building all these weeks while he thought, *wow, what a nice friendship between two guys, I'm so lucky to have a friend like that.* Because after listening with enraptured panic to the Storytime, Will remembered the way Hannibal flirted and asked him out the day they met and how dismissive he'd been, so sure he didn't date men. Which was *ridiculous,* given that he had nothing to base that on and had hardly ever dated at all. And which he regretted so much now, he just wanted to scream.

Worse still, when the reading was over and the kids scrambled off to explore the children's books and toys, the *Moms* descended in full force, and even a few Dads! Which was even fucking *worse.* Every adult, okay, *almost* every adult, who had brought a kid and wasn't wearing a wedding ring formed a circle of admiring praise around Hannibal.

One Mom sent Will over the edge, not only because she was pretty, with short, curly auburn hair and emerald green eyes, but also – her flirting game was excellent.

"I have to speak to the PTA at Randall's Elementary, that's Jonas' school," she said in a lilting voice revealing an Irish accent that made Will want to slit her throat. Jonas must be the brat kid she had, and who she wanted Hannibal to be a stepdad to. *Gross.*

"I just know you'd be a wonderful guest reader for their class. Why don't you give me your number," she suggested, as she took out her stupid little iPhone. Meanwhile, all the other admiring parents of Storytime attendees glared at her.

Will charged through the crowd as aggressively as he could without being too rough or knocking them down like he wished he could. And he grabbed Hannibal's arm, almost fainting again at the warmth, the smooth skin and hard muscle, then the older man's surprised, curious gaze leaving those other *nobodies* and landing on Will.

“Will?” Hannibal, in a rare occurrence, was absolutely clueless as to his friend’s meaning with this interruption and unexpected intensity. “What is it?”

Will just pulled his arm. And nodded to indicate Hannibal should come with him. He was trying not to cry or hump Hannibal right there. Or very possibly both…! *Words?* What were those?

Ahhhhhaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa! I’m going to die, I am actually gonna –

“Do you need to borrow me for a minute?” Hannibal said lightly.

Although Will’s fingers and even nails were digging into his perfect, sexy arm and Will was acting like a mute, wild maniac, Hannibal smiled and went along while acting as if all was well and normal.

“Yes,” said Will, relieved to find his ability to think of words to say had – however temporarily – returned. “I’m borrowing you, Hannibal. And I may never return you.”

Hannibal couldn’t have been more perplexed. He made a joke, filling in the tense weirdness as Will led him with fiercely quiet insistence to a little study nook, secluded in the travel books section, where shadows fell on it at a good angle for – for –

“You'll have to return me eventually, my friend,” Hannibal smirked. “There’s a fifty dollar fine otherwi–”

Will loved that Hannibal let himself be half-dragged by his “friend” anywhere Will wanted to go, when he had all those other people vying for his attention back there, and everywhere, really. He chose Will’s company every time and now Will had to know why.

He pushed Hannibal’s shoulders with that same strange urgency, not hurting, but with sufficient pressure for it to be a begging command of some kind. Hannibal instantly obeyed, sitting down at a desk, and looking up at Will in astonishment as Will climbed onto his lap, straddled him tightly, wrapped both arms around his neck and kissed him.

“Tell me you want this,” Will muttered desperately, clinging to Hannibal’s hair and grabbing his shirt collar at the back. “Because I don’t want to be your friend. Not just your friend. Am I your best friend, Hannibal?”

Hannibal’s now kiss-reddened mouth dropped open as his pretty amber eyes went wide. “Of course you are, Will.”

As if in shock, his beautiful hands only now came up to hold Will, caressing his back in the most loving, soothing massage, leaning up to kiss the younger man who sat so demandingly in his lap.

“You like me better than them?” Will asked, even dizzier than before, from Hannibal’s slow, sexy, skillful kisses.

“Better than who?” Hannibal asked frankly. As if he’d never been this honest, or at least, he hadn’t in a very, very long time. And it scared him a little but he still went there.

Emphatically, Hannibal told him, gazing at Will with adoration thickening his voice, *his voice*–! – "I can't see anyone else. Only you."

"Just the sound of your voice makes me crazy," Will admitted feverishly.

Hannibal stared at him, then swallowed hard. "*Good.*"

He leaned up and kissed Will, teasing him with a lick across his lips to open them as Will sighed and leaned against him, experimenting by rolling his hips. Then, Hannibal groaned deep in his throat, reciprocating the grinding rhythm. "Keep going," he ordered, and this time he licked deep into Will's mouth, tugged Will's lip with his sharp fangs, and sucked it before starting over, his hands wandering all over Will's body with firm exploration.

"*Ah!*" Will moaned in a panicked whisper.

The pleasure was too much.

They were rock hard, so hard their trousers might as well not even be there. It was easy to make the hot, overwhelming thrum of pleasure sweep over them again and again as Will moved against Hannibal, surrendering to his wet kisses as they started to get messier. So Will kept grinding, sitting on Hannibal in that little study nook in the travel section, right at work, in public, and he could not possibly stop.

Each time a passionate kiss made Hannibal's glasses sit crookedly or almost fall off, Will caught them and adjusted them properly, never missing a beat. He really,*really* liked the reading glasses…although they weren't even *fair.* Sometimes their glasses clinked together with a funny little noise, making them laugh and kiss a few extra times for good measure. None of this slowed down their frantic dry humping, though.

Will learned through nothing more than being so fucking horny he couldn't help himself in the slightest, learned how to keep rubbing their hugely erect cocks together until eventually, the pleasure started to find a recognizable, building tempo.

The librarian cried out softly, tears rolling down his pink cheeks as Hannibal gripped his messy curls and called him "*Sweetheart*."

"You're doing *perfectly,* Will, oh, yes, just right. You're going to make me come here and now." Hannibal kissed him savagely, pulled his hair and then put his open palm on Will's ass, growling and groping it. "I've wanted to strip you naked and bend you over the Circulation desk since the beginning…that's it, baby, don't stop…*oh, Will, ah*–"

His voice made Will's spine tingle as his kiss and slight manhandling made Will's blood run even hotter. Hannibal's murmured, seductive and even dirty words made the world spin off its axis and shoot off to some unknown, *wonderful* destination at the speed of light. Knowing Hannibal was transporting; it was reshaping Will into himself. Hannibal was everything to him.

Will used to believe he was looking for that one original thing that would make him fall in love, while sure it was so rare he would never find it (not that he thought he deserved to). He

could never be content with the ordinary, and blamed himself for it, as proof that his loneliness was his own fault.

But while it was one incredible quality of Hannibal that startled Will into realization of love (his voice), there were hundreds of other tiny details and more defining elements that made up who Hannibal was, innumerable ways Will loved him. There was no one else like Hannibal, no one who even came close.

"I think – *ah, ah, ah*–" Will ground down again, his breaths getting short and his moans higher in pitch. He did his best to keep them low, but his brain was barely working, he was so turned on – Hannibal's grip on him, his molten, constant and demanding kisses, his voice, *his voice,* his *body* and how he knew exactly the way to use it to make Will come (any place, any time), all of it tore Will to pieces.

"Hannibal! I think I'm fucking *in love* with you." This escaped him in a hapless, whimpering whisper, mixed with rapture as they moved together, fitting one another perfectly.

Will closed his eyes, leaned back as Hannibal held his hips and guided his movements, roughly shoving their hardness together and making Will go faster as he thrust upward, grunting animalisticly now. His elegance had left the building as he, too, fell to pieces in Will's arms. Watching Will arch his back, following his commanding guidance with those large, hot hands locked on delicate hips, squeezing, moving him however he liked, made Hannibal even harder as he neared climax. When Will said "I love you," Hannibal's own voice broke on a moan, as if pleasure and happiness snapped him in two.

He came with a harsh shudder and kept thrusting against Will as Will ground down, until the younger man orgasmed, coming in his pants with a jagged cry. He had to bite on Hannibal's shoulder to avoid actually screaming as the white-hot, unbelievable pleasure seared through him. They were both sticky and wet with their clothes on, and somehow it wasn't embarrassing but so goddamn *hot.* Will felt like he was going insane and did not want to go back to sanity, not ever.

"Shit, did I say 'I love you'?" Will panted, wrapped in Hannibal's arms as their hearts beat fast and sweat trickled down both of their brows. "I'm sorry."

"Didn't you mean it, beautiful boy?" Hannibal leaned back and looked him in the eye. "Will. Tell me you want this, too. Now, I'll never be able to let you go, or at least…I *won't.*"

Will nodded wildly, "Yes, yes, I meant it! God, I couldn't help saying it, I meant it so much. I'm so in love with you I can't even breathe without you, and I never realized until now –"

"Because of…*The Magician's Nephew*?" Hannibal asked, genuinely surprised.

"Because of *you.* I could listen to your voice all day, all night, but I need all of you. Your time and attention, your hands on me. Your…*oh, God.* Hannibal, can you take me home?"

"Of course, baby." Hannibal and Will both laughed when they stumbled on shaky post-coital legs in the attempt to stand.

Will hugged him tightly, possessively, obsessively again and leaned up to whisper in his ear, "Take me home and *fuck* me, Hannibal…please."

Hannibal growled, then pulled his hand back and gave Will's ass a good, hard smack. A *spanking*. It was so loud in the quiet room that Will gasped, shocked in every way. But his dick twitched and started to fill out again too soon, so he felt a painful, exciting over-sensitivity. He *loved* that feeling. Hannibal spanking his ass…oh, God.

"You're a bad boy, Will, and I think it's time you learned what happens to bad boys."

With that, Hannibal took Will's hand, the look of hard lust on his face almost enough to knock Will over. And he took him out of the library, right in the middle of Will's shift, opened his car door for his lover and drove Will straight to his house.

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Hannibal carried Will inside, then right to the bedroom, where he dropped Will on the soft, yet firm mattress on top of buttery-smooth, teal blankets. The afternoon sun was kept out by pulled curtains, and the room was dark, so they could just see each other because they were so close, already mouth to mouth again as impatient hands tugged and undid and yanked at clothes. Their underpants were a total mess, of course, but it didn't matter; they were destined to be thrown to the floor with the rest of it.

Hannibal's eyes were now much darker. They were naked together now, aching and *throbbing*. Hot skin, panting breath.

Then he held Will's wrists down to the bed with an inescapably powerful hold, which Will had no time to react to outside of a loud moan (he could get away with that now) because the next thing he knew, Hannibal was thrusting against his thigh like a wild thing and consuming his lips with ferocious kisses. Will surrendered to his control with perfect bliss, crying from the intolerably strong arousal he had to endure as Hannibal teased and played with him.

"God, please…oh, you feel *good*…you're perfect," Will whispered.

"I'd do anything for you, sweet boy," Hannibal answered – but his incomparable voice was deep and devilish. His words were true, but his intentions at the moment could not be more greedily lustful. "And I'll give you everything I have. For so long I've wanted you, your perfect mouth, your beautiful body, you, *deep inside*…all of you…"

Will realized with a dazed disbelief that Hannibal got so wet when he was turned on, the sheets and Will's skin were slickly soaked. It wouldn't even require lube for him to sink right into Will's virginal tightness, and as soon as he figured that out, while Hannibal pinned him down even harder and bit his neck, he cried out, "don't make me wait any longer, I want you inside me, fuck me, please – Hannibal, need you…"

Hannibal thrust even more fiercely against the softness of Will's thigh, sweaty and wet with the older man's precum like so much of Will's skin currently was. He groaned huskily and warned Will, "If we don't go slow, I might hurt you."

The intensity of his eyes told Will everything he needed to know. Which was that in this moment, Hannibal was about to snap, barely able to stop himself thrusting into Will's beckoning, tight heat. The sound of Will begging as he cried and trembled tossed away the final layer of his restraint.

"I'll be okay," Will smiled, "Just...talk me through it."

Hannibal, who now understood what he could do to Will with his voice, said right into the younger man's ear. "Stay there and don't move an inch."

He left the bed for a moment only, returning with a black necktie from his own collection, glossy and posh. "I'm going to blindfold you. I want you to feel my voice, Will."

"Yes, God, yes, Hannibal…"

He didn't tie it too tightly, but it was firm and snug. Will closed his eyes beneath the silky blackness and let his breathing start to slow and even out. His heart pulsed for Hannibal, who was manly, heavy on top of him but never crushing, just letting Will feel the size difference, protective and dominating.

It was nothing like the few times Will had hooked up with women – soft, smaller than him, expecting him to be the one in control, making all the moves, giving all the pleasure. Male or female had nothing to do with it; he had been dating the wrong people (rare though his efforts were) because he hadn't met Hannibal yet. He could see now, it was only chance that the love of his life should be a man. It could have been a woman, but only if Hannibal was a woman. Will would have fallen for Hannibal in any form, which made it pretty obvious he had never been straight a day in his life.

Hannibal, who smelled of that exquisite cologne and now sweat and desire, his skin feverishly burning against Will's. His chest hair, tickling Will's comparatively bare, smooth chest, sent another shockwave of pleasure to his own hugely erect cock.

Hannibal said softly in his ear, "I want you to open for me, Will." And he slid two of his fingers into Will's mouth with that same firmness. He moved them in a clear thrusting movement, in and out as Will, quivering and moaning, sucked and licked.

"That's a good boy. Perfect."

Will thought he was going to float right off the bed.

"There now, focus on this feeling. I'm so, so deep inside you. Can you feel that?"

He withdrew his fingers, tracing Will's lips slowly.

"Yes…it feels *incredible*."

"Then…let me try it even deeper. Ah- you're so warm, darling, tight and smooth for me, we're so slick together…" Hannibal's two big fingers now thrust right over Will's tongue, not deep enough to gag, but just short of that.

Will's toes curled as Hannibal's voice and actions, without being able to see, drove him right out of his mind.

He nibbled at Will's ear, then sucked a bite mark on the librarian's long, pale neck, darkening the bruise. "*Mine,*" Hannibal said simply, in a rough growl, "All mine."

Will yelped, but the yelp turned into keening whimper that seemed like a plea for more.

"Shh, there now, Will." Hannibal stroked his curls and kissed his forehead. "You're doing marvelously. Focus on the sound of my voice."

"Okay," Will nodded shakily.

"You look unbelievable like this, sweetheart," Hannibal said as his voice went deep and gritty as it could go, making Will shiver and reach blindly for his lover.

Hannibal watched as his lover's cock dripped with pearly desire that smeared on Will's belly. He moaned and dipped his head, licking the beads and then sucking Will's cock, languorous and indulgent, spoiling Will. Worshiping.

"God, oh, God – fuck!" Will moaned, "You're – I can't – so good, ah- ah -"

His broken cries made Hannibal move his mouth faster and take all of Will into his skilled, wicked mouth, swallowing the younger man's big, throbbing erection with ease. Will's back arched right off the bed and he swore profusely, quivering even more now.

"You don't know how lovely you are," Hannibal purred, the sound trailing Will's sensitive skin, as if the low, yet honeyed tone was a paintbrush, covering Will in pleasure, head to toe. "My darling. I want to try something special, and then I promise to give you all of me. Does that sound good?"

Will nodded, then bit his lip, twitching and quivering almost wildly. He lay naked and shaking on the already sweaty sheets, musky and wet with Hannibal's precum, to the extent that Hannibal had to have Will lift up for a moment so he could place an absorbent blanket underneath the younger man's body. And then he got something else to bring back to bed with him.

Looking up into the blind, dark, unknowable mystery of anything Hannibal wanted to do to his body, Will fell in love with being consumed and claimed, not having to be so in control of himself. There was no pressure not to be strange and awkward, to try and "Get it right" this time ("it" was basically everything in life).

No. Hannibal already considered him perfect and refused to hear otherwise. Will gave into Hannibal, which meant letting a lot of other harmful, upsetting weight from the past fall right off of him at last, to sink down to the bottom of the ocean of his mind. He didn't need them anymore, the paranoia, low self esteem, intrusive, self-deprecating remarks on a loop in his mind. Apologies for himself. Hannibal desired him, would be inside him, and he was going to be so full. He would forget how to care about anything else.

“My beautiful, sensitive and responsive boy,” Hannibal murmured, pressing kisses all over Will’s face, lingering on his jaw with a playful, soft bite. “I want to see how sensitive you are…right…here.”

At the same time that he said “here,” as his tantalizing, dreamy, deep voice made Will fall even further in love, yet float higher, too, Hannibal pressed something absolutely freezing cold to one of Will’s hard, rosy nipples.

Hannibal had an ice cube, and he was slowly circling Will’s nipple with it, the older man’s breath catching as he watched the pink nub getting even harder. Will didn’t have to see to know that Hannibal’s hungry eyes were searing into him, devouring the sight of him, laid out defenseless and shivering, gasping and begging as Hannibal continued his playful torment on the other nipple.

“Hannibal! God…so – I’m so hard, it feels so amazing, no one ever did that to me, I never knew – oh, Jesus…fuck.”

Hannibal, evidently satisfied by Will’s reaction, dragged the ice cube slowly down the center of Will’s chest this time. It began to melt, dripping on Will’s hot skin, and then Will realized it wasn’t just that; the ice was also melting because…it was in Hannibal’s mouth now. Hannibal was tracing the ice all over Will’s upper body, holding the cube between his teeth. Slippery, freezing cold liquid melted more on Will’s belly now. Hannibal drew a wet circle around Will’s belly button, then all over his abs, and then let what was left of the ice melt away there…before licking it up.

The older man moaned and gasped almost as loudly as Will did. He bit down on Will’s lower belly as if he’d wanted to for so long, he couldn’t stand to wait anymore.

“Ow! Oh. Oh, yeah, can you lick me there and do that again?” Will’s face was tipped up, showing Hannibal his neck and his pillowy lips. He was gripping the blanket beneath him for dear life, his cock heavy, jutting out proudly, and his breaths coming fast.

“Sorry,” he added, before Hannibal could delightedly do just as he’d asked. “Not if you don’t want to, though.”

Hannibal could have cried. He licked Will’s adorable, sexy belly and then bit him there, harder, relishing the boy’s cries before he moved up and claimed Will’s lips again. “Never apologize for telling me what you want.”

“Ohhh…okay, I’ll try…” Will shivered with a sob he held back. “I’m really overwhelmed.”

“You just need to be taken out of yourself, just completely submerged in the pure, unrelenting bliss I mean to drown you in…” Hannibal’s husky voice licked along his shivering skin, smooth and warm like velvet. “I’d like you to keep focusing on my voice. I want to get you ready for me, baby, how is that?”

“It’s all I want.” Will’s wobbly smile expressed more feelings than he could – with words, anyway. “You’re all I want. Tell me more?”

He was still wonderstruck at the number of huge realizations which had filled a single day of his life. Realizing that not only was he – apparently, *extremely* – attracted to a man, he was in love with his best friend. His best friend, who had been over the moon with happiness, who took Will home and into his heart to cherish. How could all of this be happening?

At least this form of overthinking was on a nicer topic, free from second-guessing, but it was still more complex thinking than he could do afterwards for quite a long while.

Hannibal began his silky-slow, confident and loving tutorial by having Will suck his fingers again, making them wetter until he was dripping with Will's saliva. "Perfect. You see, I'm so very wet for you, darling, that this will be enough…"

He moved his hand, leaving Will with a feeling of deprivation that immediately ended when a wet, slick finger began to press into him. "Feel that, Will? Nothing but you and me, opening you, relaxing you for me. Letting me fuck you with a smooth, easy glide. You and me together…all we need…"

Will next endured an unexpected onslaught of strange, but very potent new pleasure when Hannibal alternated the gradual pressing thrust of his finger, shallow at first but rhythmic already, with licking and tracing Will's hole with his tongue, then lapping at it, squeezing Will's ass cheeks before burying his face deeper and licking even more intensely, moaning deeply.

Because of the blindfold, Will didn't have a chance to see what Hannibal was doing and potentially object, not even because of where his lover's mouth was (Will never, *never* would have thought this would feel so damn good) but the prolonged and pampering foreplay, the treating Will like he was precious. Instead, he just gave in once again, parting his thighs more when the gently deep voice told him to.

Hannibal, mesmerized as he replaced his tongue with his finger and slid deeper, stared at the sight of it disappearing into Will's pretty pink hole, then felt how tightly Will's body held him, and could hardly believe the beauty and perfection of it. He forgot to keep talking, but when Will began to tremble too much, he quickly guessed the reason and resumed narration. "Shh, darling, don't ever worry when we're together. And we'll always be together, won't we?"

"I hope so," said Will emotionally.

"I know so. Now, I have you a bit more relaxed, so I want you to try and surrender again, believe in me, know I won't hurt you, this is going to feel good. I'm going to add another finger…there…ah – absolutely beautiful, Will. You feel like heaven…so perfect…"

The silken praise in his favorite voice slammed right into the shocking ecstasy of penetration, and Hannibal only had to brush his prostate once before he orgasmed, fingers twisting in Hannibal's hair as the older man looked up and watched him, enraptured.

"I don't think I'll survive this," Will trembled, but Hannibal kissed his overwhelmed shock away, murmuring to him sweetly.

“You are going to be with me always. And I know that you can endure everything I give you. Do you want to give yourself to me, Will? Are you mine for the taking? Even if the pleasure is too much and makes you feel that panic of yours about being loved, and how you don’t believe it’s possible, but it’s happening? I think that is why you fret, isn’t it?”

“Exactly.” Will stroked Hannibal’s sweaty hair, marveling to find that his lover’s own reactions were overwhelmed, too. That Hannibal’s excitement and powerful feelings matched Will’s own. “But I know you can take that away, replace it with certainty. Please, I want you to take me.”

“That’s a good boy, darling, such a perfect angel.” Hannibal lined his slick, dripping cock up to Will’s wet, welcoming hole and began to press in, all the while cascading words of adoration down on Will, between tender kisses. “I know, it seems like it won’t fit, or it will tear you apart, but we’ll get there. Hold on. Listen to my voice. Let me love you.”

Will sighed, “You’re so big, so…you feel….like you’re….more than I can have…please, don’t stop.”

“You have me, Will,” Hannibal assured him throatily. Now, as he became able to thrust more smoothly forward, he stroked in and out to give Will a sense of what this would be like. Will clutched his back, holding him desperately as Hannibal moved, and their lips met countless times, tongues brushing warmly together and sliding wetly, Will gasping into his mouth.

Hannibal pinned his wrists again and thrust more firmly, until it happened; he was inside Will, down to the last inch, his balls brushing against Will’s ass as he bottomed out with a deep gasp of his own. Then, there was nothing for either of them but to fuck as if they were drugged with some crazy, dangerous aphrodisiac. But the drug was each other. They couldn’t come back down.

They hugged tightly, Will wrapping around him to get as much of Hannibal’s thick cock as he could, Hannibal moving in and out with solid, long, breath-taking thrusts, beginning to press against Will’s prostate now. The sensitive part of Will which had held such hidden, unknown ecstasies he never even fathomed, set off wave upon wave of unbearable bliss. Most of all, it was the fullness, and being impaled, utterly taken over with Hannibal inside him and fucking him, while he had that perfect voice in his ear, calling him a good boy who had been very bad, but Hannibal was so proud. He liked this version of Will, taking what he wanted and asking for more. Admitting he could be adored, offering himself completely.

The day would come for them to unfold many secrets to one another. Hannibal had no idea that Will had killed, too, and experienced the forbidden delight of his own hunt. That Will had actually met Winston while trailing a future victim, and had saved the dog from the terrible owner who he then wiped off the earth to make it a better place.

And Will had forced himself to abandon the habit, overcome with shame and self-hatred at the period of vigilante insanity in his twenties. It was one more reason he believed he was an unlovable freak. When he learned that Hannibal was the infamous Ripper, the one whose designs had held Will in guilty thrall on many occasions, Will would be astonished that it was possible to fall so much deeper considering how in love he already was.

That there was a way to become even closer.

But on this first night, they did not need to know everything, or to confess anything but mutual obsession, passion that made their bodies feel so much, that made them push themselves hard to make love longer, try everything they could, moaning in absolute exhaustion with the determination to make the other come one more time. When they couldn't do much more than cling to each other, Hannibal had come twice inside Will, warm, sinfully thrilling. Making Will his own in yet another new way. And Will had come a total of four mind-melting, heart-throbbing, body-draining times, collapsing at last with heaving breaths until he grew sleepy enough to calm down…a little.

Hannibal held him close, soothing and kissing him as he pulled the blindfold gently away. Will blinked at him, blushing and kissing him immediately. "You're gorgeous. I can't believe I'm really here with you."

"Hmm. If it seems like a struggle to accept it, then I suppose I have little choice but to prove it to you again. Could you give me…around two hours to recover first?"

Will giggled and kicked at him adoringly.

Hannibal took his time cleaning them both, but especially in tending to Will with his voice and his hands, repeating his love and devotion as he used a warm, wet cloth to make sure Will could sleep comfortably.

It was by *far* the best sex and the wildest time Hannibal ever had in bed. Will was *extraordinary*, a force of nature.

What a mess they had made. And they were just getting started.

Hannibal spooned up behind Will and sighed as the younger man automatically curled against him, yawning. Their whispered goodnights (forgetting that it was only around 3pm - what did time matter, anyway?) were almost lost into the soft, only ever so *slightly* dorky snores that soon followed, and drifting off, they both knew they could only sleep if they were holding each other. All was right with the mad world now.

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The following night, they slept at Will's place. Hannibal made an excellent impression on Winston, spending time to give him a toy he'd bought and a dog biscuit from a batch he had baked at the cafe earlier.

At bedtime, Will suggested an idea for a new book club.

Hannibal climbed in beside him and gave his lover a coy smirk. "Oh? What is the theme, naughty boy?"

The sight of Will, wearing only his boxers and glasses, had Hannibal wildly aroused again, and Will blushed with the knowledge.

"Well, you know how we have the Romance of the Month Club at the library?"

“Yes,” Hannibal nodded.

“You and I should have our own little…*naked* book club. Where you read to me from the dirty parts of romance novels until I burst and then pounce on you.”

“That’s a fantastic idea, my dear,” Hannibal said with amusement and yet more arousal.

He could do so much to Will using only his voice that he knew their experimentation in this area had also only just begun.

“We could begin tomo–” he’d been about to propose, only to find that Will had leaned over and opened the bedside table’s drawer beside him.

And now the librarian was pressing a thick, Regency romance novel into his hand with a wicked grin. “We could start with this one if you want.”

“It looks promising,” Hannibal smiled back. “*The Daring Duchess and the Devastating Rake*. So, it’s *Will Graham and the surprisingly torrid reading habits.*

“It isn’t for *me* to read. I want to hear *you* read it to me, every wicked word. I can only imagine what it’s going to do to my body, but…my body is ready.” His happy, trusting smiles were enough to light up Hannibal’s whole world.

Will snuggled against Hannibal’s bare, furry chest as his lover held the now opened book in one hand and wrapped the other arm snugly around Will. With his own glasses on for reading, he threw himself into the new book club with the expected enthusiasm.

This particular book club, while closed to any new members, was to be an enduring one. Will invested himself fully in “attending” nightly meetings, while Hannibal only grew more talented in his narrating with time and frequent practice. It was difficult, to say the least, for Will to listen to more than a page before losing it and having Hannibal’s cock in his mouth seconds later. But luckily, they learned that Hannibal was quite good at continuing to read for quite some time while Will sucked him delightedly. It would certainly be a shame not to carefully follow every plot detail of their reading, after all…

And so, in this ritual and many others that would blissfully unravel with time, Hannibal fulfilled the promise of making their love story the best one Will ever heard and felt.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! 🌹❤️📚💳🥘🔪🪨😍

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Potential series playlist
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0W009Ix2J7qQLW6DnnwK6L?si=f6cab07e1d3d46dc

Find me on social media!
Tumblr: some-sick-deja-vu (hannigram sideblog), earthsickwithoutyou (main)
Twitter: @earthsickwoyou

End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Next time: Hannibal finds every excuse in the world to show up at the library frequently (while playing it *so cool,* of course), but Will still sees him as just a friend. What is it going to take to open Will's eyes to the soulmate just waiting to be discovered? And what will he say when he finds out that this soulmate also happens to enjoy a rather specific and forbidden cuisine?

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Potential series playlist (work in progress)
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0W009Ix2J7qQLW6DnnwK6L?si=d621827e11fa495a

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